



REMEMBERING **Annie Ratzlaff**

March 16, 1939 - June 11, 2017



Annie Ratzlaff was born on March 16, 1939, in Paraguay, to Abram Ratzlaff and Anna Ratzlaff, nee Epp.

Annie's parents were from the Soviet Union and had fled the country because of religious and economic persecution. They escaped one bitterly cold winter night over the frozen Amur River into China where they then lived for about 2 years and where they were married. In 1932 Abram and Anna traveled by ship to the Chaco, Paraguay. The Chaco was a very sparsely settled area of hot, dry scrub and grassland. It was a very difficult time for Mom's parents; they had to adjust to the place that was dubbed by many as 'the green hell.' They had 10 children, of which the first two died in childhood. Mom was born on the Yalve Sanga mission station while her parents were ministering there to the indigenous people, the Enhlet. Her father was the administrator and did some pastoral care, and her mother acted as a nurse and midwife as well as helping to run the mission. Mom's life in Paraguay was very simple: there was no running water, no electricity and they had an outdoor oven and outhouse. They had to travel by horse and buggy on rough dirt roads. There were many challenges: primitive living conditions, poor soil, insects that would devour their crops, dust storms and extreme heat in summers, and being far from a hospital or any amenities. From an early age Mom had to contribute to the daily running of the household. At 6 years old she was already changing and cleaning diapers and taking care of her younger siblings. Chores for Mom and her siblings included getting water from the well, cooking, cleaning, picking cotton crops, planting and hoeing. By the age of 12 Mom was sewing her own clothes, and had to make her own patterns as there were none available. Mom's mother had received some medical training in Russia and was often called upon to treat ill people or deliver babies, and sometimes Mom accompanied her to help. Or when her Mother was called out to a household farther away to deliver a baby Mom was

often put in charge of the household as her mother could be gone for several days. There was a lot of work to be done to keep the household running but Mom has also fondly talked of playing with her siblings. Mom didn't have toys, and had only one doll, but she and her brother Heinz and her sister Katie would often entertain each other playing outside. They used their imagination, played in the mud and made slingshots to capture wild birds, which they sometimes even roasted themselves over a fire. This was a delicious treat as there were limited food choices in their home and they often lacked protein. Mom loved the seasonal foods that grew in their area, including watermelon, guava, manioc, sweet potatoes and citrus fruits when they were later introduced to the area. Mom's father sometimes took several children with him on trips and occasionally they would camp out overnight under the stars, which Mom recalled as some of her favorite times. She was close to her father; he was a gentle person who taught her to treat others with care and respect. Her father was a minister so there were high standards for his children - they were expected to be good examples to others and behave well. Growing up as a child of a minister and a nurse, both of them serving their community as well as the native people, Mom had many examples of how to live a purposeful life of compassion for others. She saw kindness and charity in action on a daily basis. Her father modeled a life of praise and perseverance, choosing not to complain when life was difficult. Mom decided at an early age that this is how she wanted to live her life, taking Psalm 50:23 as her life motto. 'Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God.' When Mom was 12 she went to boarding school, Zentralschule, far away from her parents. Again the bar was set high for her as they had a very strict schedule: getting up early to do chores, attend classes, do homework, and then more chores. She has fond memories of close friendships she made over the years. She finished Grade Ten and then she went to Bible School for two years. In 1953, when she was 14, Mom's older sister married Henry Ratzlaff, who had a brother Richard. Richard was born in Poland, went to Germany after World War II, and moved to Paraguay with his parents in 1948. Richard took an interest in Annie and before he moved to Alberta, Canada, in 1955, he asked Mom if he could write letters to her. For the next several years the two of them exchanged letters until Dad asked Mom to marry him - she was 19 years old. He was permitted to sponsor Mom to come into Canada with the understanding that they would have to be married within 30 days. Mom left the Chaco and saw a city for the first time in her life when she went to the airport in Asuncion for the long trip to Canada. They were married on June 29, 1958. Mom and Dad lived in Calgary near her sister and Dad's brother. It was a very different life for Mom who was accustomed to open spaces, a warm climate, country life, freedom, and a lot of family around her. She learned to adapt to a modern way of living, becoming acclimatized and adjusting to city life. Mom was always industrious and so even though she couldn't speak English she took on some housecleaning jobs and later babysat. In January, 1960, Rudy was born and in January 1961 Richard joined the family. It was a busy time for Mom and Dad. Dad was a framer who worked long days, 6 days a week. Mom worked hard at home, looking after the boys and taking in extra children to babysit and help pay the bills. Mom and Dad both missed country living and having more land so they discussed whether to move back to Paraguay. They also checked out the Fraser

Valley in BC and felt that would be a nice option. They visited Paraguay for a 6 month stay and decided that the Fraser Valley was a better fit for them. In the fall of 1964 they moved to their current property in Arnold. Wilma was born in 1965 and Margita in 1969. Mom was very happy to have a beautiful open space they could call home and a big yard for her children to play undisturbed. She got a great deal of satisfaction from working in her garden with Dad every spring and summer. They planted fruit trees on their yard and planted a huge vegetable garden every year. Mom and Dad would store away potatoes, carrots, apples and garlic for the fall and winter. Mom would can hundreds of jars of jam and preserves for the family and worked tirelessly all summer. Every July we kids were required to go raspberry picking with Mom and she was a speedy worker. She would encourage us to stay diligent and do our best every day because we were paid for how much we picked. Mom and Dad raised animals on their hobby farm and we would have a cow or two, which provided us with milk and cream. Mom would make her own butter, cottage cheese and yogurt. Sometimes they had chickens, turkeys or pigs and later sheep. Mom and Dad would raise calves to sell for extra income. Mom would help with the haying in the summer so there would be food for the animals and when Dad had to work late she would do the barn chores along with her household chores. We kids were taught to work alongside her and learned how to apply ourselves to tasks she gave us and to take on the work ethic she modeled for us. Mom thrived on living on the acreage in the country and got a lot of joy out of beautifying the yard and gardens. She was known and admired for her green thumb and gorgeous flowers. She loved to be creative and was also an accomplished seamstress, sewing most of our clothes when we were young, as well as her own.

Margita's Memories: *Mom and Dad chose to buy their acreage partly because of its proximity to Arnold Church; their faith community was integral to their life. Mom especially enjoyed fellowship with the Arnold MB women, making soap and quilts for MCC, delivering meals to each other when babies were born or there was sickness, baking cookies for clubs and VBS. I have many fond memories of playing with my dolls underneath the quilt frame that was set up in the basement listening to Mom and the ladies talk and pray while their fingers flew with needle and thread. Sometimes I was asked to thread needles so they could work even faster. Mom greatly admired the hard work and spiritual discipline of Mrs. Mary Loewen. She and Mary often made noodles together and Mom lamented that she just could not work as fast as Mary. Later on mom made noodles with my kids and me, shaking her head at our leisurely pace! The year I was in Kindergarten mom needed stomach surgery and could not care for me, so during her illness and convalescence I went to live with Mary Loewen and her family. She was happy to have me there and treated me like her own daughter. Mom knew the value of strong friendships and made sure to reciprocate favours. She also treasured her life-long friendship with Helga Loewen, they shared their joys and sorrows together for over forty years. In the last few months of mom's life her Ladies Bible Study group sustained her with prayer, encouragement and food for Dad and us kids. We are grateful to Lori Sytsma for coordinating gifts of food.*

In the late 1970's Mom started a health business and began to take an interest in preventative ways to treat health. Having faced many health challenges, Mom found that taking concentrated nutrition supplements and eating an optimum diet of

healthy foods had an extremely positive impact on her health. She struggled for years with lack of energy, allergies, ulcers, and digestive issues. She had numerous hospital visits, surgeries and clinic appointments. After Mom's health improved she began to share that with others and for over 35 years she was able to coach people and help them improve their own health. This gave Mom a great deal of satisfaction and she made a difference in many lives. She soaked up knowledge and listened and learned so she could help others to live healthy, vibrant lives. Mom used a lot of the income she earned to donate to charity by sponsoring needy children, and supporting causes such as MCC, Christian Blind Mission, Mission Without Borders, and contributed to Arnold church and their ministry. Mom also got to do some traveling which was a passion of hers. She managed to visit much of Canada as well as the US. She returned to Paraguay several times and also visited Egypt, Israel, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Mexico, Uruguay, and Bolivia. Mom was always up for an adventure and traveling brought her a lot of joy. Another source of joy for Mom was when her children got married and she became a grandmother. She lovingly cared for the new babies, basking in the joy of holding, bathing and caring for them. She babysat willingly and often, caring for her grandkids with much love and attention. Every time they entered the house they were greeted with a cheery hello, home-made treats, and often a big meal. Every summer family would gather together at Mom and Dad's place; as the grandchildren grew older Mom enjoyed making fresh doughnuts with them, canning and sharing the bounty of her garden. She enjoyed growing the typical garden plants but also experimenting with new vegetables. Under her hand the garden flourished. She loved to share the fruits of her labor with family and any friends and gave generously to anyone who came by. Mom lived her life as a shining role model for her family and friends: a loving wife, strong mother, godly woman, faithful friend, and selfless giver to all who asked of her. Those of us gathered here today to celebrate and honor her life know that she has impacted each one of us in a unique way. May we be inspired and encouraged to follow in the path she walked and live by the words of the psalmist: Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God. Psalm 50:23 (NRSV).

Mom passed away peacefully on June 11, 2017, with loved ones by her side. Mom was predeceased by her parents Abram and Anna, her sisters Suse, Else, and Kathe, and her brother Helmut. She is loved and remembered by her husband of almost 59 years, Richard, her children Rudy and Jocelyn Ratzlaff, Richard Ratzlaff and Erika Friesen, Wilma Ratzlaff and Brian Friesen, and Margita Ratzlaff and Sherman Reimer; grandchildren David Ratzlaff, Richard and Erin Ratzlaff, SharaLynn and Kevin Ford, Erik Hayes, Natasha Hayes, Lauren Hayes, Malcolm Reimer and Eleanor Reimer; five siblings: Adeline Unger, Gerhard Ratzlaff, Helga Vogt, Heinz Ratzlaff, Elfriede Dyck, brothers and sisters in law and dozens of nephews and nieces and their families.

